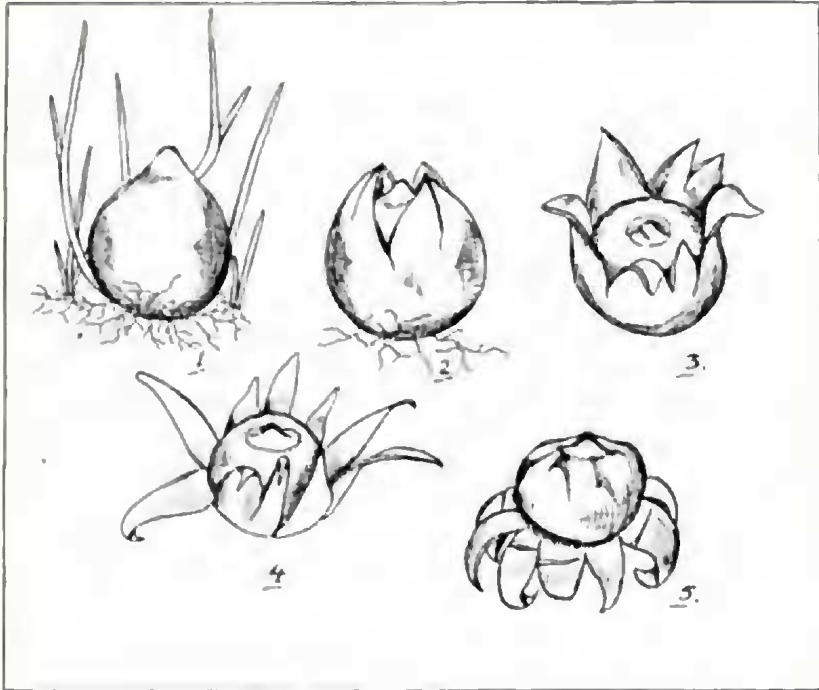


## A SUBURBAN COLONY OF "EARTH-STARS"

By J. H. WILLIS

Those curious little fungi so appropriately called "Earth-stars" (genus *Geaster*) are seldom found except among the fallen leaves of forests or on the sandy scrub-lands of our coastal and dry inland districts and, although they are gregarious by nature, it is unusual to collect more than several specimens at a time.



*Geaster* sp., probably *G. saccatus*, showing developmental stages from egg.

While removing a vigorous growth of weeds from my home at Brighton, during the latter part of November, I was amazed to find among the tufts of Prairie Grass (*Bromus catharticus*) an enormous colony of Geasters, showing every stage of development from the tiny unexpanded "eggs" to old withered "stars." Dense mats of white mycelium (the vegetative portion of the fungus) were interwoven with the grass roots over an area of some two square yards, and from this "spawn" literally hundreds of fruiting bodies were springing—a careful count revealed more than 500!

The identity of the fungus is uncertain, pending a measurement of the spores, but it is very probably *G. saccatus* (first recorded from Brazil, with very small spores, one four-hundredth of a millimetre in diameter), belonging to the group with raised, fibrillose mouth and hygroscopic rays.

Geasters live upon humus in the ground, but whether there was any mutual relationship between the Prairie Grass, roots and the mycelium which grew among them, or whether the habitat were purely accident, I am not prepared to say. To my knowledge no record exists of so many "Earth-stars" having appeared together in an area so small as two square yards, although other "puffballs" do occasionally appear in vast troupes; C. G. Lloyd, Ohio, reports the phenomenon of a paddock so covered with the uncommon phalloid *Lysurus* that it was impossible to walk anywhere without treading on them.

The accompanying line drawings of our Brighton *Geaster* will serve to illustrate the developmental stages from pointed "egg" (1) to old, crab-like "star" (5).

#### EXCURSION TO HUMPHRIES' HILL, FRANKSTON

A mild, dull day on Saturday, November 20, was ideal for the Club's botanical excursion to Frankston. Twenty-four members assembled at Humphries' Hill at 3 p.m. and enjoyed a ramble of two and a half hours on the hill-slopes toward Moorooluc. All regretted that the time available for exploration was so short, the Humphries' Hill area providing such rich and varied material that a full day could be well spent there.

Despite a rather superficial search, 120 plants were recorded, including 96 flowering species (in 36 different families), 3 ferns, 7 mosses and 13 fungi. *Gramineae* and *Leguminosae* were dominant families, with eleven species of each in flower. Of the grasses, two species of *Poa* excited special interest—one, the common Tussock Grass, *Poa caespitosa*, grew luxuriantly in a moist dell with flowering stems eight feet high! while around its roots flourished the delicate and matted form, *P. tenera*, like soft masses of green horse-hair. *Poa tenera* was given a very apt name by Hooker in his *Flora of Tasmania* and it surely merits specific rank, although recent botanists have not attempted to distinguish it from *P. caespitosa*, to which there is very little resemblance.

Orchids were curiously scarce, and only three species were seen during the afternoon—*Calochilus Robertsonii*, *Microtis parviflora* and an asparagus-like shoot of *Dipodium punctatum*.

Of showy flowers, the more conspicuous ones collected were: Blue Tufted Lily, Twining Glycine Pea, Scarlet Coral Pea, Slender Stackhousia (very tall), Love Creeper, Blue Pincushions and Grass Trigger Plants; but for charm of setting, the pride of place went easily to *Mazus pumilio*—a much smaller plant, related to the garden musks. *Mazus* grew as rosettes embedded among the soft green patches of *Poa tenera* in shady dells, its violet, lipped flowers closely simulating blooms of the Purple Bladderwort, a marsh-loving insectivorous plant which was not observed.

Robust specimens of Sweet Hounds-tongue (*Cynoglossum swartzolens*) were unusually fragrant, but the two humble Opercularias which were found did not inspire a very intimate olfactory acquaintance!

The season, of course, was unfavourable to fungi, but the dozen odd species noted were quite representative and colourful—gilled, bracket, puffball and several other forms. *Pleurotus lanpae* (the luminous agaric), *Amanita mappa* (a toadstool with offensive odour and nauseating taste), and *Fomes robustus* (a large woody bracket, parasitic on Black Sheoaks) were conspicuous, while an old tree trunk smothered in tiers of the tiny, downy-silver *Stereum vellereum* was strikingly beautiful.

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Leaders.